



May 12, 2009

Representative Mark S. Meadows
Michigan House of Representative
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
S1088 House Office Building
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Honorable Representative Meadows:

We write today in full support of the passage of HB 4836 – The Michigan Anti-Bias Crime Statute. The City of Grand Rapids Equal Opportunity Department (EOD) and the Community Relations Commission (CRC) have a long history of support for such legislation.

In 1998, EOD, CRC, and the Michigan Alliance Against Hate Crimes established a regional alliance to address hate and bias issues in greater Grand Rapids. On September 15, 1999, the alliance put their community response system for hate crimes and bias incidents into practice when an African American male was dragged behind a car and beaten. Kent County Prosecutor William Foresyth charged the perpetrator with not only assault with the intent to commit great bodily harm less than murder, but also with violations of the Michigan Ethnic Intimidation Act (Act). Our alliance and coalition of community groups followed the arrest of the suspect, provided support to the victim, and witnessed and watched the trial that ensued to ensure that justice was served.

Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids are fortunate to have a Prosecuting Attorney who is willing to charge individuals under the current Act. However, the Act is limited and ineffective in addressing hate crimes. The Act provides that if an individual is found guilty of a violation, and they are convicted, the sentence for ethnic intimidation is served concurrently with other sentences. There are no provisions for additional penalties for violation of the Act. Thus, the lack of additional or enhanced sentencing creates a disincentive for prosecutors to pursue charges of ethnic intimidation and creates the illusion that such crimes and incidents may not be occurring.

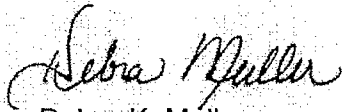
Changes to the Ethnic Intimidation Act – now called the Michigan Anti Bias Crime Statute, include sentencing enhancements for individuals found in violation of the statute as well as protections for the free speech rights of all persons. Additionally, the Michigan Anti Bias Crime Statute incorporates groups that are often the targets of bias crimes such as crimes motivated by disability, gender, sexual orientation and veteran status.

The positive changes proposed by this legislation will provide Michigan citizens with protection against acts that affect victims, and spread the poison of hate throughout communities. The Michigan Anti Bias Crime Statute has broad support in civil rights and law enforcement communities and would provide the tools to fight and prosecute criminals who seek to demoralize and divide our community for no purpose other than hate, bias, intimidation and violence.

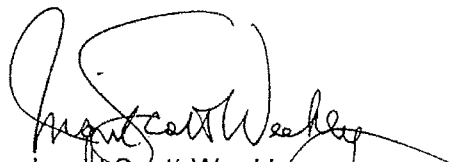
Please share our correspondence and support of this bill with the members of your committee as you discuss these vital changes.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Debra K. Muller
Community Relations Commission Chair
City of Grand Rapids
300 Monroe NW, Suite 840
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
(616) 456-3027



Ingrid Scott-Weekley
Equal Opportunity Director
City of Grand Rapids
300 Monroe NW, Suite 840
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
(616) 456-3027